



STATE OF CONNECTICUT

OFFICE OF STATE ETHICS

STATEMENT OF THE OFFICE OF STATE ETHICS ON GOVERNOR'S BILL NO. 6363, AN ACT IMPLEMENTING THE GOVERNOR'S BUDGET RECOMMENDATIONS CONCERNING GENERAL GOVERNMENT, CONSERVATION, DEVELOPMENT, REGULATION, PROTECTION, JUDICIAL AND CORRECTIONS

The Office of State Ethics ("OSE") is opposed to Section 19 of Governor's Bill No. 6363.

Section 19 would repeal Connecticut General Statutes Section 1-81a, which prohibits the Governor from reducing the OSE's budget or budget requests and requires the submission of the OSE's budget directly to the General Assembly for consideration. Section 19 also contemplates a repeal of comparable provisions related to the Freedom of Information Commission ("FOIC") and State Elections Enforcement Commission ("SEEC").

The proposed repeal of Section 1-81a will greatly undermine the independence of the OSE and its core functions that ensure honesty, integrity and accountability in state government through education, interpretation and enforcement of the Codes of Ethics.

In 2004, the General Assembly recognized the importance of maintaining strong and independent government watchdog agencies by passing with overwhelming bipartisan support Public Act 04-204 which afforded them protections from political pressures of a single elected official. The passage of PA 04-204 reflected the legislature's determination to insulate the three watchdog agencies not only from then Governor Rowland's attempted consolidation of the OSE, FOI and SEEC, but also to protect the agencies from future political influence.

Although it is imperative that the independence and integrity of the OSE and other watchdog agencies be protected, the OSE, FOI, and SEEC are not without oversight. The legislature plays an important role in controlling the watchdog agencies' budgets through the collective voice of many. The legislative oversight through Committee deliberations and eventually through the vote of the General Assembly provides for thorough analysis and determination of the agencies' fiscal needs.

The OSE would like to note that despite its independence as a government oversight agency, the OSE has been very responsive to the current fiscal crisis. The agency lapsed over \$460,000 of its 2007-2008 budget. It has maintained three staff vacancies in response to the Governor's request for a hiring freeze, resulting in a 14% reduction in its allotted staff. Finally, its 2008-2009 budget of \$2.6 million has been cut by nearly \$520,000, a total cut of 17.5%, in Deficit Mitigation Plans 1-3.

In 2005, the State of Connecticut, having experienced an ethics scandal that ended with its Governor and other high ranking state officials in jail, made a commitment to strengthen government ethics with the creation of the Office of State Ethics. Repealing 1-81a would erode this commitment and would be an unfortunate step backwards.

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